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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of the relationship between female, upper-level, university administrators and their husbands were surveyed to determine if the husbands served as mentors. It is hypothesized that spousal mentoring occurs for this group and that their relationship is similar to phases of nonspousal mentoring among successful, female corporate managers. In addition to a review of the literature on mentors, results of a survey-based study of female university administrators are compared to a study on female corporate executives conducted by Missirian. Of 111 university survey respondents, 19 indicated that their husbands were the primary influencers in their career development. Interviews were conducted with 10 of the 19 respondents. The comparative data indicated that characteristics of the female corporate manager and the university administrator were different, including characteristics of marital status, average age, educational attainment, and salaries. While none of Missirian's respondents indicated that they had spousal mentors, about 85 percent of both study populations identified strong influencers. Based on the interviews, it is concluded that mentoring occurs between spouses and that the process is similar to that between nonspousal mentors and proteges in professional settings. (SW)

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MENTORS FOR FEMALE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS: SPOUSES IDENTIFIED

by
Ruth D. Atteberry

The relationship of mentors to proteges has been recognized as a special relationship--one of mutual respect. It implies a combination of tenderness and firmness on the part of the mentor and awe on the part of the protege, a combination potentially portentous for a spousal-mentor role. At least partially because the relationship is seen as desirable in its ideal state, the subject of mentors has been studied extensively over the past several years, from which has come a spate of publications on the subject in the popular press as well as in academic journals.

Conclusions from the various studies range drastically: The mentor-protege relationship has been extolled,[1] deplored,[2] and simply denounced as being impossible (at least in its purest sense) in modern times.[3] Early studies on mentors during this period of special interest on the subject centered around male mentors in management settings;[4] then came studies on female mentors in corporate settings,[5] followed by mentor roles among university administrators.[6]

Definitions of a mentor vary somewhat among researchers; but most of them at least allude to the classical

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example of Mentor in The Odyssey, who served as a guide, counselor, protector, and teacher for Ulysses' son; and most acknowledge that the mentor-protege relationship is intense, having developed over a period of time.[7] Some writers have concluded that the development occurs in distinguishable phases.[8] There are variations in view as to how long the mentor-protege relationships endure and as to whether they end amicably or unhappily.[9]

Another dichotomous view exists as to who can be a mentor for whom; for example, while Daniel J. Levinson, one of the best-known authorities on mentors, stated that "A husband cannot remain his wife's mentor,"[10] Gail Sheehy, whose study focused on women in the arts, found that several women had mentors who were either husbands or lovers.[11]

Partially, at least, it was this latter variation in opinion about whether husbands could serve as mentors to their wives that gave impetus to a case study of female, upper-level university administrators to ascertain whether they had recognized specific individuals as being particularly influential in their career development, and if so, whether these individuals were their spouses. The major purposes of the research were to assess whether the characteristics of the relationship between the female administrators and their influential husbands were sufficiently similar to those of mentor-protege relationships which had been studied in corporate settings to classify the association as

mentor-protegee relationships and then to examine the nature of the relationships to ascertain the effect.

This paper focuses on the findings from the case studies, but first it provides a brief description of the research design and summarizes results of the phases of the study which led to the examination of cases.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The general questions for this study, which was completed in 1983, asked, "Do high-level female university administrators experience mentoring relationships similar to those of high-level female corporate managers; more specifically, do female university administrators recognize their spouses as mentors?"

The two central hypotheses were that spousal mentoring occurs among upper-level female university administrators and that the phenomena and phases of spousal mentoring among upper-level female university administrators are similar to the phenomena and phases of non-spousal mentoring among successful female corporate managers.

Because the exploratory nature of the research suggested open-ended questions rather than tightly worded hypotheses to address certain issues, the hypotheses were augmented by the following research questions:

a. Can the teaching-learning exchange that occurs between husbands and wives appropriately be labeled mentoring?

b. Does mentoring between husbands and wives proceed through phases of initiation, development, and termination, as described by Agnes K. Missirian?[12]

c. Do the marriage partners who are in a mentoring process recognize at the time of the experience the presence of the mentor-protegee relationship?

d. If partners recognize that mentoring is in process, at what point do they do so?

e. Do women who experience a mentor-protegee relationship in marriage identify "supportive behavior" (as noted by Harry J. Levinson)?[13]

f. Do women who experience a mentor-protegee relationship in marriage identify "destructive behavior" in the mentor (as noted by Daniel J. Levinson)?[14]

g. If the spousal mentoring process follows the Missirian phases, does termination of the process create an unhappy relationship, as was found by Harry J. Levinson[15] to occur between mentor and protege?

RESEARCH DESIGN

In addition to a review of the literature on mentors, the study included a survey of female university administrators which provided information for comparison to Missirian's earlier study on female corporate executives.[16] The research design for this phase of the study and the results of the survey, as well as comparative data analyses, are presented here as briefly as possible in an effort to assure

that the major focus of the work--case studies of spousal mentoring--are given due attention.

A 29-item survey instrument was mailed to the entire population (171) of female upper-level university administrators in the United States. For purposes of the study, "upper-level" was defined as president, vice president, chancellor, or academic dean; and "universities" was defined as coeducational senior colleges and universities. The 64.9 percentage of completed, returned, and usable responses resulted in a solid data base for comparing descriptive profiles of female university administrators to female corporate executives queried in Missirian's study. Nineteen respondents indicated that their husbands were the primary influencers in their career development. From these nineteen, ten university administrators were selected for interviews through a process which cast response data against a previously designed model for subjects in the case studies.

RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY

Highlights of the survey analysis and comparisons of the participating university women administrators to the women executives queried by Missirian are worthy of comment here before the case studies are discussed.

Hypothesis 1, "Spousal mentoring occurs among female upper-level university administrators," was accepted tentatively based on the fact that 19 respondents out of 111

indicated they had spousal mentors. This finding differs drastically from Missirian's finding in that none of her respondents indicated they had spousal mentors. The relative prevalence of influential individuals, however, was almost equal between the two populations. That is, 85.7 percent of the corporate managers identified strong influencers, and 85.6 percent of the university administrators identified strong influencers.[17]

Comparisons of descriptive data between the Missirian study and the study on university administrators reveal that while both populations may be viewed as having achieved "upper-level" positions in their organizations, this achievement is where the close similarities end. Salaries for corporate women executives are much higher than those of university administrators; the individuals in Missirian's population had remained in their current organizations 15 years compared to 10.5 years for the population in this study; and the university administrators had by far the higher percentage of college and university degrees.[18] For example, while 11.4 percent of the corporate women had no college degrees, 100 percent of the university women had degrees--with 79.3 percent holding doctoral degrees--while none of the corporate women in the sample studied held doctorates.

Marital status between the two populations also was quite different, especially in the category of those never married (42.9 percent of the corporate executives were

never married compared to 24.3 percent of the university administrators). The corporate women's average age was 47.8, and the university women averaged 51.5 years of age, suggesting that in spite of more formal education and with the expectation of receiving much less remuneration at high levels of achievement, the university women were older than the corporate women when they achieved "success," as defined in this study.[19]

Little difference was found between the two populations as to their views on the impact of affirmative action legislation on their achievements, and the two populations compared closely in the number of individuals whom they recognized as having been of great influence on their careers. As would have been expected because of the greater percentage of university administrators who achieved advanced degrees compared to the corporate women, a far greater percentage of the university women met their mentors while enrolled in college or the university (36.3 percent of university women compared to 3.3 percent of the corporate women).[20] While there was little difference between the two populations as to whether they themselves had served as mentors, there was disparity as to gender of their proteges.[21] Thus, while the populations may be compared as to the number of mentors in the lives of individuals within the two populations, descriptive data of the two populations generally are dissimilar.

The final phase of this study included interviews with ten of the university administrators who had indicated that their husbands had been the individuals most influential in their career development and with two of the spouses involved. These interviews provided information from which the conclusions were drawn that mentoring occurs between spouses and that the process is similar to that between non-spousal mentors and proteges in professional settings.

Armed with a demanding itinerary which included previously arranged appointments with interviewees, a tape recorder, a 46-item interview schedule, and face sheets, the researcher launched the most-significant phase of the research. By means of private automobile, jet planes of major airlines, twin-engine planes of minor feeder airlines--one with non-retractable landing gear--taxi, transcontinental bus, airport shuttle, and limousine, the researcher traveled up and down the coast of California and then embarked on a ten-day trek to Texas, Georgia, and the East Coast to Vermont--stopping enroute in Virginia, New York, and New Hampshire--before returning to the West Coast via Ohio and Wisconsin to conduct interviews in all states mentioned. The two husbands who participated in the study were interviewed by telephone, and all interviews were tape recorded.

Space limitations preclude detailed comparisons between descriptive data of the corporate executives interviewed by Missirian and the university administrators being

discussed here, but some descriptive data and some comments on the women as they appeared during the interviews seem appropriate. The interviewees were either vice presidents or deans in coed colleges or universities, with salaries ranging from a low of $26-$30,000 to above $60,000, having spent an average of 10.5 years at their current universities. All have doctor's degrees, and one has done substantial post-doctoral work. Eight are now married; one of whom previously was widowed is married to a second spouse; one remains widowed; and one is divorced. Their average age is 51.8. They appeared self assured; they were articulate and willing to explore the aspects of the relationships they had experienced with their spousal mentors, though two of them at the outset of the interviews stated that they had not previously recognized the expansive support they had received from their husbands in a mentor-protegee relationship.

The husbands who were interviewed described their wives as bright, anticipatory, capable of achieving any position to which they aspired. These men saw their spouses as competent and well qualified for the presidency of a university, and both expected their protegees soon to acquire top-level positions in academic institutions. Furthermore, each of the women attached to the men interviewed was either actively seeking a presidency or had reasons to expect an eventual appointment or had been invited to take a presidency which she had not yet accepted.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Hypothesis 1, "Spousal mentoring occurs among female upper-level university administrators," was accepted tentatively in the study under discussion based on the findings that 19 of the 111 respondents to the mailed survey stated that their spouses were the individuals who had been most influential in their career development. Further confirmation of this hypothesis resulted from the findings of the interviews as the research participants described the teaching-learning relationships they had experienced with their spouses and as these descriptions were evaluated in terms of the definitions adopted for purposes of this research.

Hypothesis 2, "The phenomenon and phases of spousal mentoring among female upper-level university administrators are similar to the phenomenon and phases of non-spousal mentoring among successful female corporate managers," was accepted based on objective and subjective information gathered in the personal interviews. Assessment and evaluations were made by using the pattern of sequential phases (initiation, development, and termination) established in the report of Missirian's findings as a basis for comparison. In addition, the questions attendant to the hypotheses were used as organizing standards within the phases. Information provided in the interviews which had been recorded and transcribed was extracted and inspected to

compare with and contrast to Missirian's work. The resultant portrayals of the spousal teaching-learning experiences corresponded in general to non-spousal mentor-protege experiences as described by Missirian.

Of the ten cases examined, six of the cases corresponded closely to the definition of mentor adopted for this study. The spousal mentors served as teachers or counselors, challenging their protegees to develop professionally. At a critical juncture in the protegees' careers, the mentors gave special support, with some of them demonstrating willingness to sacrifice--to go out of their way in the interest of the protegees' career advancement. A deep emotional involvement prevailed between mentors and their protegees in which each was vulnerable, vulnerable to each other because of the interchanges that occur between teacher and student and because of the development cycle that changes the relationship. In most of the cases examined in the 1983 study, the mentoring had greatly diminished or had ended, having followed phases of initiation and development, and finally having subsided when the mentor was no longer needed because the protegee experienced some level of achievement in which she felt a measure of pride.

While four of the cases did not correspond closely to the mentoring standard established for comparison in this study, some of the attributes of a "true" mentor characterized the spouses of the women interviewed; and each man gave significant support to his wife at a critical time in

her career development--so much, in fact, that the women identified their spouses as having been the individuals most influential in their career development at a critical juncture.

The seven questions attendant to the hypotheses served as organizing strands in reporting the interview results, for the answers to these questions illuminate the conclusions with regard to the hypotheses. With findings in synopsis form, these questions are presented here to complete the presentation of conclusions drawn from the interviews.

The first question, "Can the teaching-learning exchange that occurs between husbands and wives appropriately be labeled mentoring?" was answered in the affirmative on the basis that most components of mentoring as defined not only in this study but also in Missirian's study on corporate managers were found to have been present in the majority of cases studied. An implied positive response to the second question resides in the answer to the first question; that is, because the components of mentoring were found in the spousal teaching-learning dyads, the phases of initiation, development, and termination would be expected to be present. The phases were identifiable in this study as they were described by Missirian. Two components found by Missirian and by others as well, particularly Rosabeth Moss Kantor, to have been major ingredients in mentoring relationships were that of the association

of the mentor to power and that of access for the protege to this power through the mentor. These components were non-existent among the spousal mentors and their protegees. And in keeping with this finding, the mentors were in no position to open doors for career advancement for their protegees as the mentoring relationship ended.

The third and fourth questions, "Do marriage partners who are in a mentoring process recognize at the time of the experience the presence of the mentor-protegee relationship?" and "if partners recognize that mentoring is in process, at what point do they do so?" are discussed together. Only one of the interviewees stated that during the initiation stage she recognized her spouse as her mentor; the others indicated that they recognized they were getting special assistance from their spouses in regard to their career development, but most of them indicated they had not used the "mentor" concept until later. Seven of them indicated that they recognized their husbands as mentors while the mentoring was in process, even if they originally had not used the term "mentor."

Questions five and six are treated together: "Do women who experience a mentor-protegee relationship in marriage identify 'supportive behavior' (as noted by Harry J. Levinson)?" and "Do women who experience a mentor-protegee relationship in marriage identify 'destructive behavior' in the mentor (as noted by Daniel J. Levinson)?" All the women interviewed indicated that their spouses were

exceptionally supportive in respect to their development, and several indicated that their husbands had demonstrated willingness to sacrifice their own career goals to assist their protegees. Only one interviewee indicated that her spousal mentor exhibited destructive behavior, behavior which she judged as being capable of creating dependency and which she thus had seen as potentially destructive. Overall, the mentoring relationships as described by the protegees were seen by the protegees and by the mentors as positive experiences, even though the marriage itself in a case or two was seen as tenuous.

The last question examined was, "If the spousal mentoring process follows the Missirian phases, does termination of the process create an unhappy relationship, as was found by Harry J. Levinson to have occurred between mentor and protege?" In only one case was considerable unhappiness described by the protegee whose spousal mentoring relationship had terminated. In the other cases, even when there had surfaced some jealousy on the part of the spousal mentor because of the protegee's achievements beyond those of his own, mutual pride in the protegee's achievements was the dominant characteristic of the experience as the mentoring subsided or terminated. There did appear to be a bit of sadness in the protegee's tone of voice--as was true in two of the cases examined--when it was acknowledged that though the marriage remained intact at the moment, future

career opportunities could take precedence over the marriage relationship, if the spouse who had served as mentor becomes reluctant to concur in regard to the career options. And in fact, through correspondence between one of the interviewees and the researcher, it has been revealed since the interview that another of the marriages in which there had been a mentor-protegee relationship has been fractured.

In summary, it was found that--at least among female university administrators--spousal mentoring does occur, and with similar attendant risks for catastrophic results; or on the other hand with similar opportunities for positive career development as prevails among corporate female executives.

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[4]For example, see Daniel J. Levinson, The Seasons of a Man's Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

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[10]Daniel J. Levinson, pp. 238-239.

[11]Sheehy, pp. 132-133.

[12]Missirian, pp. 60-62; 143-149.

[13]Harry J. Levinson, The Exceptional Executive: A Psychological Conception (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 139-140; 147-149.

[14]Daniel J. Levinson, p. 100.

[15]Harry J. Levinson, "Mentoring: Socialization for Leadership," a presentation to the symposium, The Mentoring Process; Men and Women, Husbands and Wives. Annual Academy of Management meeting, Atlanta, August 9, 1979 (Typewritten).

[16]Missirian.

[17]Ibid., p. 49.

[18]Ibid., p. 53.

[19]Ibid., p. 23.

[20]Ibid., p. 41.

[21]Ibid., p. 44.